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TAGS: [PTER](#) [EFIN](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [TU](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: PKK MEMBERS REMAIN IN CUSTODY; MFA COMMENTS

REF: A. PARIS 484

[1](#)B. PARIS POINTS OF 2/15

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT FOR REASON 1.4 (b) AND (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: DCM spoke with the Foreign Minister's Chief of Staff, Pierre Vimont, on February 12, and with Political Director Gerard Araud on the 13th to express appreciation for the government's arrest of suspected PKK terrorist financiers and to encourage a successful prosecution. French MFA Turkey desk officer told us February 15 that the February 7 arrests of key PKK financiers was based on an independent judicial investigation led by chief counterterrorism judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere. Schuster stated unequivocally that the investigation was in no way motivated by a GOF desire to improve relations with Turkey following the recent proposed legislation would have criminalized denial of the Armenian "genocide." He also dismissed the February 12 visit of former Minister Delegate (at Interior) and current Sarkozy political advisor, Patrick Devedjian, to the Kurdish cultural center where some of the arrests took place (next door to Sarkozy's campaign headquarters), as the action of a private citizen and not representative of GOF views. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) French MFA Turkey desk officer Pascal Schuster told us on February 15 that the February 7 arrests of a number of key PKK financiers was the result of a purely independent judicial investigation, led by chief counterterrorism judge, Jean-Louis Bruguiere. He said that police acted under the discretion of the judicial authorities who issued warrants for the 15 PKK members. Since the arrests, he said, there had been some discussion of possible reprisals from the PKK, but so far the GOF had received no serious threats. In any case, he stressed, the current situation was clear: the PKK members arrested were judged by the judiciary to be a threat to French interests and had to be apprehended. In this case, he added, the government would not contemplate questioning the judiciary's independence, or its decisions.

¶3. (C) Schuster said the MFA had begun a dialogue with the Turks following the arrests and that the Turkish response had been overwhelmingly positive. He dismissed public speculation that the move may have been intended to make up for proposed French parliament legislation that would have criminalized the denial of the Armenian genocide in France. (Comment: The proposed legislation, passed only by the lower house, significantly cooled already strained relations and has already resulted in the loss of a number of military contracts (approximately 12 billion USD) for French companies.) Schuster said he understood that the Turks were working with French police, but he was not aware of the specifics. Additionally, he commented that the French had not yet revisited their (somewhat unspoken) policy barring extradition to Turkey, but that, for the moment, nothing had been ruled out. Schuster was hopeful that the arrests would lead to improved Franco-Turkish relations, while adding that no one was yet prepared to declare a major breakthrough.

¶4. (C) When asked about the visit of National Assembly member, Patrick Devedjian (a political advisor to Presidential candidate and Minister of Interior Sarkozy, and possible Justice Minister in a Sarkozy government), to the Kurdish cultural center where some of the arrests took place (next door to Sarkozy's campaign headquarters), Schuster said that Devedjian was no longer a member of the administration and did not speak for the government. His visit was personal, both as a citizen and as a "neighbor" of the establishment, though Schuster understood that Devedjian made the visit in order to clarify that the arrests were part of an independent investigation, that Sarkozy was not behind them, and that the GOF was not targeting the Kurdish people. Schuster was insistent that Devedjian had his own political agenda and most likely had not acted on the orders of Sarkozy, the minister. At the same time he could not rule out entirely that Devedjian could have acted on behalf of Sarkozy, the presidential candidate. (Note: We are seeking a meeting with MOI officials. See background, paragraph 7, for more information on the Devedjian visit.)

U.S. EMBASSY RESPONSE

¶5. (C) DCM spoke with the Foreign Minister's Chief of Staff, Pierre Vimont, on February 12, and with Political Director Gerard Araud on the 13th to express appreciation for the government's actions and to encourage a successful prosecution. Other officers in the Embassy have followed suit at various ministries and at all levels of the government.

BACKGROUND

¶6. (U) According to GOF and mediasources (see ref B), French police have placed 14 of the 15 arrested PKK members into "provisional detention." According to French law, the suspects can be held in custody for up to four years, at which point the government must either release them or take the case to trial. Charges include money laundering, criminal conspiracy with a terrorist organization, and terrorist financing. Under the January 2006 law, they could face up to 20 years in prison. (COMMENT: It would be unusual for judges to order detention of the suspects for a long period of time unless they believed their case was particularly strong.)

¶7. (U) At least one defendant, Attila Balikci (presented as Riza Altun, s secretary), claims to have been an intermediary between Altun and DST (roughly the U.S. FBI equivalent) officials. He also claims to have met with National Assembly member Patrick Devedjian when Devedjian was Minister Delegate in the Interior Ministry under Sarkozy. DST officials confirmed that they had been in contact with PKK members, but claim the purpose was only to warn the PKK against crossing "red lines," stressing that the PKK members were not informants. Devedjian claims not to recall meeting with Balikci while noting that he met with many Kurds in his

previous capacity. At a meeting on February 12 with Kurdish Diaspora at the Kurdish cultural center (located next door to Sarkozy's campaign headquarters), Devedjian also commented that the arrests were not at the behest of Sarkozy, as some Kurds have suggested, but resulted from an independent judicial investigation.

¶18. (U) Several groups and individuals, including the Movement for Peace, the Greens, the Communist Party, Jose Bov, and the Movement against Racism and Friendship among Peoples (MRAP), have called for the release of the Kurds, denouncing the accusations as false. The Green Party publicly speculated that the arrests were intended to placate Turkey following the National Assembly's recent proposed legislation that would have criminalized denial of the Armenian genocide. Ten of the Kurds arrested have maintained political refugee status in France for more than ten years.

COMMENT

¶19. (S//NF) Comment: Given Judge Bruguiere's penchant for obtaining high level approval for his actions and his interest in running as a UMP candidate, it is unlikely he would have ordered such sensitive arrests without Sarkozy's personal consent--though the decision appears not to have been fully coordinated with all of the security services. Policy and intelligence officials have long told us that they preferred to avoid becoming a target of the PKK, and had warned PKK members on many occasions not to cross certain red lines. Money laundering on French territory, intimidation of Kurds for fundraising purposes, and direct links to Northern Iraqi Kurdish terrorists may finally have changed the dynamic enough to push French officials to pursue local PKK networks. Intentionally or not, the arrests may also have opened the door to better relations with Ankara.

¶10. (S//NF) Comment Continued: For the moment we should focus our efforts on showing appreciation and political support for the arrests, and monitoring the French/Turkish relationship as the cases move forward. We can also encourage Ankara to work quietly behind the scenes with French authorities on legal and political issues, while urging the Turks to stay publicly positive about the French prosecutions. A good outcome (and process) could help influence the GOF to stay tough on the PKK, while taking a step towards repairing the current icy France/Turkey relationship. End Comment.

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